Twenty Years Already?

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doi: 10.1681/ASN.2009111154

With this issue JASN completes its 20th year of continuous publication. JASN’s origin was no accident. Many members of the American Society of Nephrology had long sought to compete in the scientific and clinical marketplace of ideas and, although its birth back in 1990 was not painless, JASN was their answer. In this issue, Jared Grantham, the founding editor, reminisces about JASN’s birth and early development.

Since its beginning, JASN has witnessed many elegant contributions to the science of renal medicine, and the JASN repository of knowledge has strengthened tremendously the field of nephrology. Although two decades is still relatively young by most publishing standards, we felt some celebration and acknowledgment of its accomplishment to be in order—on the cover of this volume we have added a small medallion of attribution to mark this anniversary of JASN’s founding. JASN has been a leader in nephrology publishing since inception, and we thank all of the authors, reviewers, and editors who have worked so hard over the years to make our journal such a remarkable success. Happy anniversary to our readers.

The Birth and Early Development of JASN

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doi: 10.1681/ASN.2009090910

In 1987, a “big bang” revamped and supercharged the American Society of Nephrology (ASN): The ASN broke out of the shackles of its original management company, unleashing from that sleepy club of professors the ASN Council, an energy surge that expanded the universe of the society by several orders of magnitude. No longer content with offering only an annual meeting, the ASN put its council and active members to work to position nephrology for the new millennium.

Two years later, in the spring of 1989, the council laid plans to launch a new journal, The Journal of the American Society of Nephrology (JASN), as a vehicle to inform and educate a growing number of kidney specialists worldwide. Negotiations with one editor candidate broke down, and the council turned to me, its secretary-treasurer, who they thought was having entirely too much fun courting banks in Kansas City in which to stash the ASN’s new riches. This seemed even better, so on relatively short notice, I formulated a plan that was approved by the council and then set out to recruit a deputy editor, Lawrence P. Sullivan, and associate editors Gerald F. DiBona, H. William Harris, Jr., Nathan W. Levin, Roger C. Wiggins, and J. Harold Helderman. The science credentials of this team were uniformly outstanding, but perhaps the finest recruitment of all was our managing editor, Bonnie O’Brien. Ms. O’Brien provided the editorial experience the rest of us lacked, having served several years as editorial assistant for the Journal of Laboratory and Clinical Medicine. She set aside her dream of becoming a tennis professional and settled in to organize and administer JASN’s day-to-day operations from the new office in Kansas City.

Few individuals get to launch a new journal of science. We found the experience exhilarating, but with several thousand nephrologists looking over our shoulders, many believing there was no need for another journal, I constantly worried that the party invitations had been sent out but that no one would show up for the dance. We began to call in our “markers” from friends and colleagues. The doors opened to new submissions on January 2, 1990, and Vicente Torres offered us the first manuscript for consideration. By the end of the month, we had a grand total of seven papers under review. We were expected to publish 12 issues a year! In February, we viewed the approaching July 1, 1990, inaugural publication date with apprehension. We anticipated the mail delivery each day, much as a farmer rushes to the hen house before breakfast to see whether an egg has been laid.

Electronic submission had not been conceived in 1990, so simple happiness in the editorial office accompanied the receipt of a manuscript with only one set of staple marks in the upper left-hand corner. To spike the system, the council gave me the right of first refusal for all manuscripts based on the so-called “mini-lectures” interspersed throughout the oral sessions of the annual meeting. We contacted the speakers from the meeting held in the fall of 1989, and, to our delight, nearly all of them agreed to submit a paper in relatively short order. These up-to-date reviews proved to be very popular and clearly a lifesaver for the journal and the editorial team.
By March, the efforts of the associate editors and the 34-member strong Board of Reviewing Editors to spur submissions began to bear fruit, and by July 1990 we had enough manuscripts to fill three issues of JASN. We had a welcome reprieve in October because only meeting abstracts were published in that issue. We would survive!

The next hurdle we faced was getting JASN indexed in the Library of Medicine’s Medline/Index Medicus, the antecedent of PubMed. Journals not included in the citation index were dead in the water. The editors, ASN Council, and mystery supporters worked hard to win approval, and after 2 y, JASN was admitted and retrofitted to the July 1990 issue. It was shocking to us all when the first Impact Factor for JASN was two points higher than our close rival, Kidney International, whose editor, Thomas E. Andreoli, was on the ASN Council and scheduled to become president. Tom was certain that the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI; now Thomson/Reuters) had counted ASN Meeting abstract citations in the numerator of the Impact Factor because it was common practice back then to cite these in publications. Williams and Wilkins, JASN’s publisher at the time, investigated and found no evidence of such mischief. It is interesting to note that JASN has maintained its top rating among all kidney and urology titles long after the abstracts stopped being published in a regular issue.

In preparation for the 20th anniversary celebration, Lawrence Sullivan and I reexamined the July 1990 issues of JASN and Kidney International and determined the total citations in Google Scholar for the 10 articles published in JASN and the first 10 articles published in the comparable issue of Kidney International. Twenty years later, JASN still wins 342 to 264. To their credit, Tom Andreoli and Saulo Khlar, Tom’s successor at Kidney International, always treated JASN’s editors as good friends and trusted colleagues. We believe that this collegial spirit and mutual respect within our international academic discipline have contributed to both journals’ growing ever stronger through the years.

We invite readers to peruse the inaugural 1990 issue of JASN, including our editorials. There we forecast, correctly we are pleased to report, the continued exciting growth of a field of inquiry that was the first to bring the basic and clinical sciences into a mutually supportive relationship. Over the past 20 y, the field of nephrology has truly excelled with a notable exception. The National Kidney and Urology Advisory Board (NKUDAB), composed of 21 physicians, surgeons, scientists, and lay leaders from across the United States, together with key government administrators, published an executive summary outlining recommendations developed over 3 yr of study and deliberation. The NKUDAB recommended in the inaugural 1990 issue that Congress establish a new National Institute of Kidney and Urologic Diseases within the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Congress appropriate an additional $300,000 to the NIH for the Division of Research Grants to establish a nephrology study section, and Congress appropriate an additional $300,000 to the NIH for the Division of Research Grants to establish a urology study section. Sadly, these goals were never realized, because momentum for them waned with successive changes in ASN leadership.

In one of the editorials in that inaugural issue, we stated that we wanted JASN to do more than merely archive data; rather, we expected it to facilitate an interaction among nephrologists, molecular biologists, physiologists, biochemists, immunologists, and pathologists that was occurring and still does occur at the annual ASN meeting. In other words, we wanted JASN to promote a dialogue among investigators, practitioners, and students who recognize what Homer Smith so eloquently proclaimed: “The kidney makes the stuff of philosophy itself.” Looking back on the first 20 y of JASN, we think that we met that goal.

In August 1996, we turned the reins of JASN over to Craig Tisher at his cabin in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

Bonnie O’Brien, seeing an opportunity to live in tennis heaven, accepted the new editor’s offer of continued employment in Florida. She is now working with her fourth editor, JASN has changed its physical appearance and secondary internal features with each new editor, yet the scientific content and the publication timelines just keep getting better and Bonnie O’Brien just keeps rollin’ along.

Shortly before we closed the door to the JASN office at the University of Kansas for the last time, the departing editors and Bonnie O’Brien opened a bottle of Shiraz and recollected the words of the Danish novelist Isak Dinesen: “What is man, when you come to think upon him, but a minutely set, ingenious machine for turning, with infinite artfulness, the red wine of Shiraz into urine?”

Does TREAT Give the Boot to ESAs in the Treatment of CKD Anemia?

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doi: 10.1681/ASN.2009111127

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.”

Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities, 1859

The recently published landmark study the Trial to Reduce Cardiovascular Events with Aranesp Therapy (TREAT) has turned the world of anemia management upside down. Patients who have chronic kidney disease (CKD) and anemia and literally could not get up in the morning will despair that insurance com-